

Activists criticise destruction of food in the name of religion

Social activists in Orissa have criticised the destroying food worth Rs.1 million meant as offering at the Jagannath temple Friday because a foreigner had entered it -- an act seen as defiling the premises.

'It is unfortunate that in the name of religion a few orthodox people are damaging Hinduism by these kinds of act,' said Jagdish Pradhan a leading social activist and president of Sahabhagi Bikash Abhyan, a NGO.

Speaking to IANS, he said: 'It is unfortunate that we are not allowing foreigners to enter the temple. It is time we brought in more and more people from other religions into our fold.'

'It is a wrong tradition and we must change it,' Dalit leader and state president of the Ambedkar Lohia Bihcar Mancha Sangram Mallik told IANS. 'I was shocked to hear about the way food was destroyed when people are dying due to starvation in our own state. The priests have no right to do this.'

Priests at the Jagannath Temple in Puri Friday destroyed the food and performed purification rituals after Paul Rodgier, a 55-year-old American Christian, entered the temple Thursday afternoon.

The priests also asked him for a fine of Rs. 209 when he pleaded that he was not aware of restrictions on the entry of foreigners into the temple.

Rodgier had reportedly come to the government-run National Thermal Power Corp in Angul district on official work a few days ago.

As part of traditional practice, a mud pit was dug inside the premises of the temple and the holy offering was thrown into it, temple official Laxmidhar Pujapanda told IANS. 'The kitchen area also washed thoroughly,' he said.

Foreigners are not allowed to enter leading Hindu temples in Orissa, including the Jagannath temple at Puri and the Lingaraj temple here.

An American Christian woman, Pamela K. Fleig, who converted to Hinduism after marrying an Indian from Uttar Pradesh resident, was denied entry into the 11th century Lingaraj temple in Bhubaneswar in 2005.

Thailand's Crown Princess Sirindhorn was also not given permission to visit the Jagannath temple in the same year as she was a foreigner and Buddhist.

Even late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi - a born Hindu - was not allowed to enter the temple when she was in power because she had married a Parsi.

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